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books

Historian's
verdict on
Hiss casePerjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case, by Allen
Weinstein. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$15.

By Roscoe Drummond

This is more than an engrossing and revealing book about one of the most controversial court cases of modern times. It is an event. It not only illumines contemporary history with startling new evidence, but, in my judgment, will almost certainly make history by derailing the renewed efforts to reverse the verdict of "guilty" against Alger Hiss in the court of public opinion if not in the court of judicial decision.

Not many staunch admirers of Mr. Hiss will likely be persuaded to abandon their conviction that such a fine and able young man could possibly be a communist seeking to infiltrate the top levels of the American government and that he was railroaded to disgrace for political advantage on the basis of faked and fabricated evidence.

But Prof. Allen Weinstein, a historian at Smith College, apparently did exactly that. He reports that he began his researches believing Hiss innocent and was forced to reverse his judgment as he uncovered new and wide-ranging evidence that the verdict of the jury could not be impeached.

Because the Hiss case has remained controversial from the start, primarily because so many distinguished government officials avowed their faith in his integrity long after the trial, Professor Weinstein set out to find verifiable answers to these three questions:

- Did Hiss become an undercover communist while serving as a New Deal official?
- Did he turn over classified State Department files to Whittaker Chambers, a self-confessed former underground agent for the Communist Party?
- Or did Chambers, for obscure and malevolent reasons, deliberately set out to frame and destroy a respected public official?



By George G. B. Griffin

Allen Weinstein

trials and to interview the obvious sources. He obtained access to tens of thousands of pages of once classified FBI, OSS, CIA, State Department and Justice Department files on the case.

He had unrestricted access to the Hiss legal defense files. He held long meetings with every living key figure in the case, including former Soviet agents, congressional "red hunters" and close friends and members of the Hiss and Chambers families. He interviewed some 40 men and women who had never been interviewed before on this subject.

The fall of Richard Nixon in the wake of Watergate gave new impetus to the rise of the efforts to restore Alger Hiss to public grace. The argument went like this:

Congressman Nixon did most to bring Hiss to trial.

Nixon was accused of obstructing justice.

Since Nixon was deemed guilty, Hiss should be deemed innocent.

You can dissect that one.

It seems noteworthy that the validity of Professor Weinstein's conclusions are endorsed from both the political right and the political left.

Says George F. Will, conservative columnist: "Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case" is a monument to the intellectual idea of truth stalked to its hiding place."

Says Arthur Schlesinger Jr., liberal New Dealer: "This book offers the most objective and convincing account of the most dramatic court case of the century."

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study the transcripts of the congressional hearings, the pretrial testimony, the record of both
Christie, Rex Stout, and Erle Stanley Gardner combined — and it isn't fiction.